



**UNHCR**

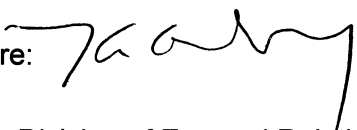
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

***UNHCR/AI/2014/2***

## **Administrative Instruction**

### **on the Use of Social Media**

Approved by: T. Alexander Aleinikoff, Deputy High Commissioner

Signature: 

Approval date: 5/9/2014

Contact: Division of External Relations

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*This and other official UNHCR guidance material is available on the Policy and other Guidance page of the UNHCR-net*

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## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 This Administrative Instruction defines responsibilities for the use of social media by UNHCR personnel and outlines principles that should inform posts to social networks.

## **2. Scope**

- 2.1 This instruction is for all UNHCR personnel (including affiliate workforce) using social media in a personal or professional capacity. It should inform any use of online social networks for publishing or sharing text, photos, videos, audio or other digital content.
- 2.2 This instruction outlines a set of principles for using social media. It is not meant to satisfy the need for practical advice about specific platforms or for higher-level strategic advice on community engagement. For support with these issues, consult the Social Media Unit in Geneva at [socialmedia@unhcr.org](mailto:socialmedia@unhcr.org).
- 2.3 Compliance with this Administrative Instruction is mandatory.

## **3. Rationale**

- 3.1 Social networks are integral to our daily life and work as humanitarians. But because they are still relatively new, they raise questions about how to use them appropriately and effectively and how to balance professional and personal lives online.
- 3.2 UNHCR has developed this instruction to help staff navigate social media ethically and strategically while minimizing potential risks to themselves and the organization. These measures serve to protect UNHCR's reputation from misrepresentation.
- 3.3 Institutional and personal accounts (see paragraph 4) each play a role in UNHCR's global social media strategy. In keeping with best practices, UNHCR seeks to restrict the number of institutional accounts to avoid fragmentation of content and maximize engagement. Personnel are encouraged to use their personal accounts to talk about their work – within their area of competence and responsibility and bearing in mind UNHCR's related guidance on speaking to the news media (UNHCR/AI/2014/4) as well as paragraph 7.3.4 below. Sometimes our institutional accounts re-post content from personal accounts to help it reach a wider audience.

## **4. Definitions**

- 4.1 **Social media:** Social media refers to any online platform or application that enables users to create and share content or to participate in social networking or dialogue.
- 4.2 **Institutional accounts:** Institutional social media accounts are held by UNHCR and provide information solely on topics related to UNHCR. We use them to share stories about people of concern; to show the role we play, the way we work and the impact we make; and to engage with key audiences in real time. (See also paragraph 6.)
- 4.3 **Personal accounts:** Personal social media accounts are held by individual members of our workforce, who take them with them after leaving UNHCR. Many personnel use personal social media accounts to stay connected with friends, family and peers as they move about the world. Some share reflections about their work, helping to build awareness of UNHCR's role in protecting and assisting people displaced by conflict or persecution. (See also paragraph 7.)

## 5. Principles

- 5.1 Posts to social media, whether from institutional or personal accounts, must uphold the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct. As with all public communications, UN Staff Rule 1.2 and Staff Regulation 1.2 and the Code of Conduct provide essential guidance in this area. In this respect, personnel must adhere to the following principles:
- 5.1.1. **Think before you post and use common sense.** Be aware that sharing content can be seen as an endorsement of the facts and opinions it presents. One of the best pieces of social media advice is this: "Don't say anything online that you wouldn't be comfortable seeing quoted on CNN, being asked about by your mother or having to justify to your boss."
  - 5.1.2. **Be honest.** Do not mislead or invite misinterpretation. If you did not witness an event, do not imply that you did. UNHCR's credibility may be at stake.
  - 5.1.3. **Be accurate.** Outdated figures and erroneous information can spread rapidly on social media. Always double-check your facts before posting.
  - 5.1.4. **Be clear.** If your post is open to misinterpretation, find a better way to phrase your message to avoid confusion.
  - 5.1.5. **Exercise discretion.** Leave sensitive issues to personnel specifically authorized to speak on them. When in doubt, consult your supervisor.
  - 5.1.6. **Respect confidentiality.** Do not share information that is not meant for external audiences, such as details that could compromise diplomacy or protection.
  - 5.1.7. **Ensure safety and protection.** Bear in mind that information you post, especially locations or personal details, could put you or others at risk.
  - 5.1.8. **Show respect and seek consent.** When you talk about, photograph or videotape the people we protect and assist, strive to respect their dignity.
  - 5.1.9. **Avoid taking sides.** UNHCR personnel must honour humanitarian principles, including impartiality, neutrality and independence. This includes refraining from making political statements that may compromise UNHCR's relationships with governments, partners and other stakeholders (see paragraph 7.3.1 below).
  - 5.1.10. **Stick with what you know.** When talking about UNHCR's work, focus on your own experiences and areas of expertise to avoid spreading dated or wrong information.
  - 5.1.11. **Show integrity.** You are responsible for your online reputation, which may impact on UNHCR's image. Be aware of your digital footprint and act as responsibly online as you would in any other public context.
  - 5.1.12. **Be transparent.** Don't use a pseudonym or post anonymous comments or content about UNHCR, the UN, displaced people or the humanitarian sector. Being clear about your identity and affiliation helps build trust and prevent misperceptions.
  - 5.1.13. **Be authentic.** When you speak from a personal perspective and mean what you say, your posts will gain more traction and visibility.
  - 5.1.14. **Be generous.** Credit others and avoid negativity. Acting superior or patronizing reflects poorly on you and UNHCR and invites criticism.
  - 5.1.15. **Listen and engage in conversations.** Do not simply broadcast. If people are misreading your posts or twisting your words, try to clarify.
  - 5.1.16. **Don't feed the trolls.** It's often best to ignore hateful, discriminatory or otherwise inappropriate comments. Answering may only encourage more of the same.
  - 5.1.17. **Seek advice.** If you are unsure whether something is appropriate to post, seek advice from your colleagues or ask [socialmedia@unhcr.org](mailto:socialmedia@unhcr.org) in Geneva.

## **6. Institutional Accounts**

- 6.1 Institutional accounts require authorization from the Communications and Public Information Service in Geneva. Personnel seeking to establish a new institutional account must complete the online form at [unhcr.org/newaccount](http://unhcr.org/newaccount), answering key questions about objectives, sustainability, risk and efficacy to request authorization.
- 6.2 Those managing an existing institutional account at the time this instruction takes effect should submit the form no later than 10 October 2014.
- 6.3 Requests to establish or continue institutional accounts will be judged on the basis of whether they are part of a coherent and sustainable communications strategy. Personnel must not spend time building and engaging communities without a clear objective; without a plan for managing, monitoring and evaluating the account; and without precautions for keeping it secure.
- 6.4 Institutional accounts must use official UNHCR branding.
- 6.5 Information shared on institutional accounts will be considered the official line, so utmost care must be taken when sharing content.
- 6.6 Institutional accounts must be closed if they are no longer updated regularly or if they fail to engage their intended audience consistently and sufficiently.

## **7. Personal Accounts**

- 7.1 The private activities of UNHCR personnel – on social media platforms as in real life – must remain within the limits of the organization's core values as reflected in UN Staff Rule 1.2 and Staff Regulation 1.2. This includes an obligation to act with impartiality, to exercise discretion and to refrain from making public statements on controversial matters. Any violation thereof may be considered as misconduct. (Affiliate workforce are subject to corresponding rules in their conditions of service.)
- 7.2 Personnel are encouraged to talk about their work on personal social media accounts, but they may choose not to mention their work at all. Many personal accounts might reflect a mixture of the user's personal and professional lives.
- 7.3 The following points offer some general advice for managing your personal and professional presence online:
  - 7.3.1 When posting from a personal account, do not make political statements that may adversely affect UNHCR's relationships with governments, partners and other stakeholders.
  - 7.3.2 Do not use UNHCR in your username, as you will have to change it if you leave the organization. Omitting UNHCR helps makes it clear that your account is a personal one.
  - 7.3.3 If you use a social network for work purposes, describe your job role in your bio to ensure transparency.
  - 7.3.4 Even if you add a disclaimer (e.g., "these are my personal views"), be aware that your behaviour online is still covered by the UN Staff Rules and Staff Regulations.
  - 7.3.5 Take responsibility for your privacy settings, which can help keep your content from spreading more widely than you intended.

- 7.3.6 When you post to social media, you are publishing—making something public—and should consider the possible ramifications.
- 7.3.7 Be aware that everything you post online, even in a private group, can become public. Content you delete may already have been copied and can still be shared.

## **8. Resources**

- 8.1 To learn more about social networks and develop your digital skills, enrol in the Global Learning Centre's online social media training (<http://learn.unhcr.org/>).
- 8.2 For other questions or more information about social media at UNHCR, write to the Social Media Unit in Geneva: [socialmedia@unhcr.org](mailto:socialmedia@unhcr.org).

## **9. References**

- 9.1 Normative or superior references
- UN Staff Rule 1.2 and Staff Regulation 1.2
  - Media Guidelines for United Nations Officials
  - United Nations Department of Public Information Social Media Guidelines (DPI/2573) <http://rfg.ee/xhY8F>
  - UNHCR Code of Conduct
  - Administrative Instruction on Working with the News Media (UNHCR/AI/2014/4)

## **10. Monitoring and Compliance**

- 10.1 Compliance with this Administrative Instruction shall be monitored by the Division of External Relations.
- 10.2 Please address complaints about possible misuse of social media or possible misconduct on social media platforms to your supervisor and the Inspector General's Office: [inspector@unhcr.org](mailto:inspector@unhcr.org)

## **11. Date**

- 11.1 This Administrative Instruction is effective 5 September 2014. It will be reviewed and updated regularly, at a minimum of once every two years, to reflect operational experience and new developments in the field of social media.

## **12. Contact**

- 12.1 Contact for this Administrative Instruction is the Chief of Content Production, in the Communications and Public Information Service of DER.

## **13. History**

- 13.1 This is the first approved version of the Administrative Instruction.

## **14. Annex**

Request to Open or Continue an Institutional Social Media Account:  
[unhcr.org/newaccount](http://unhcr.org/newaccount)